Introduction: Music and Socialism

Introduction to the Special Issue on Music and Socialism

By Danijela Š. Beard and Elaine Kelly

The end of the twentieth century was marked by a sense of closure for many in the West. The Cold War was over, Western democracy had triumphed, and the future of neoliberalist capitalism seemed secure. The 'end of history', as Francis Fukuyama prematurely called it was, of course, short lived.[1] The new century ushered in a series of economic and political crises that have shaken fin-de-siècle complacency to its core. Events ranging from the banking crisis of 2008 and the economic collapse of countries such as Greece to recent scandals surrounding 'fake news' and the activities of organizations like Cambridge Analytica have posed serious challenges to the primacy of neoliberalism, capitalism and contemporary democratic processes. At the same time, the rise of far-right extremism and populism has resulted in bewildering shifts to the political discourse both in Europe and the United States. One response to these unsettling changes has been a resurgence of leftist politics. Over a century after the Russian Revolution of 1917 and fifty years on from the protests of 1968, socialist ideals have found a renewed impetus in the rise of movements such as Occupy, Podemos, Syriza, and grassroots support for politicians like Bernie Sanders and Jeremy Corbyn.

The rise of popular socialism has been accompanied by a growing critical interest among musicologists in the relationships – past and present – that have played out between music and leftist thought. This trend, which dates back to studies such as *Music and Marx: Ideas, Practice, Politics* (2002),[2] has several defining features, not least of which is the rejection of the narrow geopolitical and aesthetic frameworks that were engendered by the Cold War. Scholars are increasingly interested in establishing the transnational reach of socialist ideals, and in exploring the productive rather than restrictive impetuses of socialist aesthetics.[3] This special issue, which evolved from a

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[1] Francis Fukuyama, 'The End of History', *The National Interest*, Summer 1989, 3-18.
[2] Regula Burckhardt Qureshi, ed., *Music and Marx: Ideas, Practice, Politics* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002).
[3] See, for example, Robin D. Moore, *Music and Revolution: Cultural Change in Socialist Cuba* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2006); Peter Schmelz, *Such Freedom, If Only Musical: Unofficial Soviet Music during the Thaw* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); Ana Hofman, *Staging Socialist Femininity: Gender Politics and Folklore Performance in Serbia* (Leiden: Brill, 2011); Eric Drott, *Music and the Elusive Revolution: Cultural Politics and Political Culture in*

conference on Music and Socialism held at the University of Nottingham in 2017, is conceived very much in this vein. It aims to provide a critical context for contemporary socialism by analysing the creative inroads that socialism has made through music. It is not intended as an exercise in nostalgia for an elusive idealism, but as a forthright and balanced appraisal of socialist thought as it has been enacted through music.

Our understanding of socialism here is a holistic one. We conceive it as a broad phenomenon that resonates across many different cultures, societies and political systems. It is an inclusive continuum spanning from the state socialism of Soviet Russia to the socially-minded activities of the hippy community in San Francisco in the late 1960s. The ways in which music has been conceived, produced and received across this spectrum is revealing of the achievements but also the limitations of socialist thought in enacting positive social change. Over the course of the twentieth century, music has served repeatedly as a vehicle for transmitting and effecting socialist ideologies. At the same time, leftist political theories have fuelled various attempts by grassroots collectives to reclaim the means of music production. Even though the failure of either of these phenomenon to effect enduring change could be read as evidence of the ineffectuality of socialism as a political or economic force, this history contains numerous utopian moments that are worth reflecting on for the latent possibilities that they reveal.

The authors in this issue analyse a series of such moments. They explore how music has been conceived within socialist frameworks, for what purposes it has been used, the effectiveness of music in political contexts, and the impact of socialist thought on the production of music. The issue opens with articles by Eric Drott and Stefan Hammel that provide historical overviews of broad aspects of music and socialism. Drott explores how and to what extent music has actually performed socialism, while Hammel problematizes the privileged role that has been assigned to artistic realism in Marxist thought and argues instead for a materialist approach to music. These are followed by four case studies that focus on specific episodes in the history of music and

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France, 1968-1981 (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2011); Robert Adlington, ed., *Red Strains: Music and Communism outside the Communist Bloc* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2013); Elaine Kelly, *Composing the Canon in the German Democratic Republic: Narratives of Nineteenth-Century Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); Nicholas Tochka, *Audible States: Socialist Politics and Popular Music in Albania* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016); Joanna Bullivant, *Alan Bush, Modern Music, and the Cold War: The Cultural Left in Britain and the Communist Bloc* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

socialism. Martin Brady looks at how the composer Paul Dessau translated the idea of labour into music; Danijela Š. Beard examines how ideals of reform socialism found musical expression in Yugoslav *novi film*; Elaine Kelly explores the contradictions that were inherent in the music produced in the name of international solidarity in the German Democratic Republic; and Benjamin Piekut analyses the efforts of the short-lived British collective Music for Socialism to formulate a working theory of sociology for the production of music. The final section of the issue comprises of three reflective pieces. Simon Frith offers personal thoughts on the role that Marxism played in the development of popular music studies; Pauline Fairclough asserts the need for a reappraisal of the music produced under state socialism; and Sarah Hill challenges the mythology that surrounds the protest movements of the late 1960s. Underpinning the entire issue is the question of what we can learn from the lessons of the past. The history of music and socialism is one that enacts moments of political hope. It is also one, however, that reveals the disjunctions between ideals and practice that frequently beset utopian socialist projects. The relevance of this history in the current political climate cannot be understated.